The reclassification of non-Western art at UCL library

Thomas Meehan, Head of Cataloguing and Metadata, UCL Library Services

Introduction

In 2019 UCL Library reclassified 2000 art books, covering art from countries outside the classical and Western canon, that were arranged alphabetically by country. This paper will look at the project to reclassify these books to try to mitigate its bias against non-classical and Western art, and how the Library implemented large-scale processes in the interests of speed and cost. It will examine the reasons why this was necessary; the technical steps taken to tackle the relatively small but still considerable numbers as simply and quickly as possible; and the potential for similar work within UCL to address issues around decolonising and liberating the collections and catalogue.

The Garside Classification at UCL

UCL is a multidisciplinary university based in Bloomsbury in central London, near the British Museum. UCL's slogan is that it is London's Global University. Most subjects are taught, some obvious exceptions being Christian theology and music. UCL's art department is the Slade School of Art, dating from 1871, which is housed in the north wing of UCL's main quad on Gower Street.

UCL uses a variety of classifications throughout its various sites, including Dewey (DDC), Library of Congress (LCC), London Education Classification (LEC), and National Library of Medicine (NLM). The main scheme in use in the Main and Science libraries, however, is the Garside classification scheme. This is named after Kenneth Garside, who devised the scheme as deputy librarian at UCL in the 1950s. He also worked at Leeds University where he employed a similar arrangement. It is otherwise unique.

The Garside scheme is based on matching collections to departments and reading rooms, and most classifying has historically been undertaken by subject librarians rather than cataloguers. The librarian responsible for the art collection is Liz Lawes, Subject Liaison Librarian for Fine Art, History of Art and Film Studies. The department emphasis can clearly be seen by the words that prefix call numbers. For art, this is sensibly short-ART- but for other subjects this can get quite long and far more difficult to fit onto a spine label without considerable abbreviation, e.g. LIBRARIANSHIP and LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY. The principles of following departmental arrangements and courses and assigning material to collections based on departmental need means that Garside is very much a pragmatic system, not an attempt at universal bibliography or a complete representation of knowledge. Below are some example Garside classmarks, showing the three main elements with some added formatting: the **subject**, *alphanumeric classification*, and ***"cutter"*** (normally just the first three letters of the author's name or the title):

LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY *N 790* ***ROO***

LIBRARIANSHIP *L 82* ***MAX***

ART *ME 11* ***MAR***

The second classmark is for Robert Maxwell's 2008 book on FRBR.

The ART Garside Classification

Here is a breakdown of the ART example:

> **ART** *ME 11* **MAR**

> | | |
> | --- | --- |
> | **ART** | The Art collection |
> | *ME* | Modern Art in Britain and Ireland |
> | *11* | Nineteenth century |
> | **MAR** | "Cutter" for author or title (in this case the author, Jan **MAR**sh) |

> Marsh, Jan. *Pre-Raphaelite sisters*. London : National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2019. 9781855147270

A summary of the Modern art section broken down by place reveals the privileged status given to British and Irish art together alongside European art generally:

- ME   Modern art in Britain and Ireland
- MF   Modern art in France
- MG   Modern art in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
- MI   Modern art in Italy
- MN   Modern art in the Low Countries (Belgium, Netherland, Luxembourg)
- MR   Modern art in Russia (including countries of the former USSR)
- MS   Modern art in Spain and Portugal
- MU   Modern art in the United States
- MX   Modern art in other countries, A-Z by country or continent

The only non-European country included explicitly in the schedules is the United States. At the bottom is ART MX as defined prior to the project in question as "Modern art in other countries, A-Z by country or continent". A-Z in this case means a three-letter cutter with no further cutter for author/title. So all books on modern art in India – e.g. *The Bauhaus in Calcutta* -- would be in **ART MX IND**; however, so would all books about modern art in Indonesia, such as *Indonesian eye : contemporary Indonesian art.* Similarly, books about modern art in either Chile or China would both go in ART MX CHI; books on both Iran and Iraq would go in **ART MX IRA**. Continents, cultures, and art movements were totally mixed up.

It follows that African art, for example, does not have its own section and is mixed up with up all other countries. The following classmarks represent African countries in ART MX:

- ART MX AFR   Africa
- ART MX CAM   Cameroon
- ART MX CEN   Central African Republic
- ART MX CON   Congo
- ART MX EGY   Egypt
- ART MX GHA   Ghana
- ART MX NIG   Nigeria
- ART MX SEN   Senegal
- ART MX SOU   South Africa
- ART MX SUD   Sudan
- ART MX TUN   Tunisia
- ART MX ZIM   Zimbabwe

In particular, note that **ART MX CAM** could also contain books about Cambodia. Books on Cambodia would be interfiled with books about Brazil at **ART MX BRA** and Canada at **ART MEX CAN**; Denmark - itself excluded from the rest of European art - would come between Central African Republic and Congo. Any general works on Africa only come first in the sequence because of alphabetical accident, not a principle of general to specific: for example, books about Brazil would file before those on Latin America generally.

The Particular Issue

A Ph.D. student based in the History of Art department undertaking interdisciplinary research on African modernism noticed this and raised the issue with the library. They were searching the shelves for works on African art and finding, for instance, Nigeria filed between New Zealand and Norway.

ART MX NEW	New Zealand
ART MX NIG	**Nigeria**
ART MX NOR	Norway

Liz Lawes determined to deal with the issue. There were two issues that needed consideration:

- A practical one: how to find material on Nigeria or related regions when they are scattered alphabetically.

- A principle: how to address the obvious dismissal of the importance of non-Western art through its relegation to an unordered section of the classification.

Liz Lawes, Bill Martin (Head of Acquisitions) and myself met to discuss what we could do. Ideally, the whole Art collection (36,000 items) would be re-classified to remove the "other"-ness of ART MX, but this would make the project too big to be practical. We decided on a limited re-classification of roughly 1800 ART MX books using an updated version of Garside's more logical (although itself also somewhat outdated) geographical Table 2.

1. Revise ART MX and produce a mapping from the old to the new.

2. Produce an Excel spreadsheet of the old call numbers from Alma and convert them to the new ones.

3. Update the MARC records using MarcEdit and update the classmarks on Alma.

4. Plus, take the opportunity to differentiate between works about an artist and a country's art in general.

New Schedules

This is an example of the new ART MX schedules, including the classmark for Nigeria:

- ART MX 65.30   Niger, art theory
- ART MX 65.31   Niger, artists a-z
- **ART MX 65.40   Nigeria, art theory**
- **ART MX 65.41   Nigeria, artists a-z**
- ART MX 65.50   Senegal, art theory
- ART MX 65.51   Senegal, artists a-z

The new numerical sequence is arranged logically, so Nigeria is placed among other West African countries rather than Scandinavian or Australasian ones.

Once the classification schedules were revised, the classmarks for each book were changed on Alma using automated processes as far as possible. Excel was used to map existing alphabetical classmarks to the new numerical ones, and to generate filing cutters from Alma catalogue data. After some manual checking, the classmarks were added to our MARC records using MarcEdit software and imported into Alma. We also used the spreadsheet to order new spine labels to be printed.

Mapping

The basic mapping involved an Excel file with the old three letter codes in one column and the new classifications in another. In this example, you can see Nigeria ("NIG") on row 48 mapping to the new classification "65.4":

44	MAL	72.0
45	MAR	63.3
46	MEX	84
47	NEW	75
48	NIG	65.4
49	NOR	49
50	PAK	70.6
51	PAL	58.7

The existing item and bibliographic data on Alma was exported to a spreadsheet. The columns containing Creator and Title could be used to generate the three letter cutters using an Excel formula. If there was a 100 field, that was used for the cutter (and 1 added to the classmark); if not, the 245 title field was used instead (and 0 added to the classmark):

Title	Author	Old Call No	AUT	TIT	New Call No
Emeka Ogboh : Lagos sc	Ogboh, Emeka, artist, interviewee (e)	ART MX NIG	OGB	EME	ART MX 65.41 OGB
Devil-may-care : the Nordic Pavillion at the 50th Venice Bienn		ART MX NOR		DEV	ART MX 49.10 DEV

Some manual processing was applied to the spreadsheet by Liz and her colleague Cecile, especially for notable artists that the automatic cuttering did not catch properly, or to deal with the pre-conversion ambiguity over countries.

Labelling

Normally our spine labels are laser-printed by our physical Processing team locally, or produced as part of a shelf-ready contract. Neither option was practical for the thousands of labels needed, so we employed a labelling company to produce these quickly at a low cost: £250. It took about 10 hours a week, over six weeks, to label and move the stock.

Getting the Data into Alma

The final stage - although the labelling in fact took longer - was to get the classmarks into the Holdings records. The first step in achieving this was to create a dummy MARC file from the Excel document, containing the system number (001 field) and the call number. There is no standard MARC field for a Garside call number, so we used the 086 field (Government Document Classification Number) as we certainly did not use it otherwise but knew that Alma would recognise it. We also put the old call number in an 087 field in case we needed it.

```
=LDR  00000nam a2200000Ia 45e0
=001  9930839585004761
=008  190812s9999\\\\xx\\\\\\\\\\\\\000\0\und\d
=086  \\$aART MX 65.41 ODU
=087  \\$aART MX NIG
```

We exported a fresh set of complete MARC records from Alma for the Alma MX collection (in case any changes had occurred since we started the work and made the mappings). Below is an example MARC record matching the system number of the fragment above.

```
=LDR  01738nam a2200349 i 4500
=001  9930839585004761
=005  20190501143018.0
=008  190501t20182018caua\\\\\bc\\\000\0\eng\d
=020  \\$a9781944903688$qpaperback
=020  \\$a1944903682$qpaperback
=040  \\$aUkLUC$beng$erda$cUkLUC
=100  1\$aOdutola, Toyin,$d1985-$eartist,$ewriter of added commentary
=245  10$aToyin Ojih Odutola :$ba matter of fact /$c[curator, Emily Kuhlmann].
…
```

Using MarcEdit's Merge function we added the 086 (and 087) fields to the MARC records, matching on the 001 system number field. This is what the final records look like in MarcEdit format, with the new classmarks in 086 fields:

```
=LDR  01738nam a2200349 i 4500
=001  9930839585004761
=005  20190501143018.0
=008  190501t20182018caua\\\\\bc\\\000\0\eng\d
=020  \\$a9781944903688$qpaperback
=020  \\$a1944903682$qpaperback
=040  \\$aUkLUC$beng$erda$cUkLUC
=086  \\$aART MX 65.41 ODU
=087  \\$aART MX NIG
=100  1\$aOdutola, Toyin,$d1985-$eartist,$ewriter of added commentary
=245  10$aToyin Ojih Odutola :$ba matter of fact /$c[curator, Emily Kuhlmann].
…
```
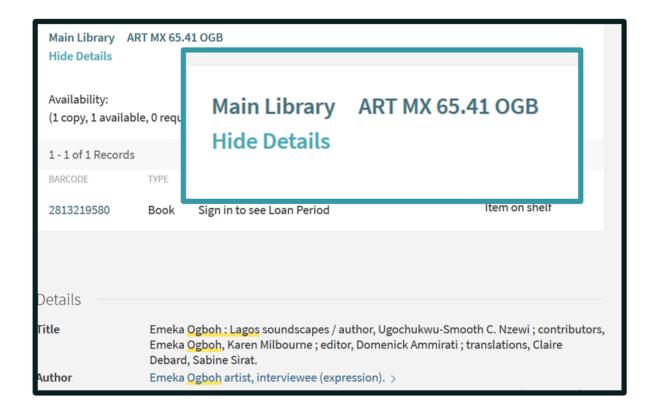
Lastly, we had to import these records into Alma, overlaying the old records, and then use an Alma job to populate the holdings records with the new classmarks. This was easily the most nerve-wracking part of the whole operation for me. However, here is that record successfully showing its new call number in our Primo discovery system:

Main Library   ART MX 65.41 OGB
Hide Details

Availability:
(1 copy, 1 available, 0 requ...

1 - 1 of 1 Records

BARCODE	TYPE		
2813219580	Book	Sign in to see Loan Period	Item on shelf

Details

Title	Emeka Ogboh : Lagos soundscapes / author, Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi ; contributors, Emeka Ogboh, Karen Milbourne ; editor, Domenick Ammirati ; translations, Claire Debard, Sabine Sirat.
Author	Emeka Ogboh artist, interviewee (expression). >

Concluding thoughts

This project was beneficial for us in a number of ways. Most obviously, it dealt with the immediate problem of the inadequate treatment of non-Western art in UCL Library. It is, however, still far from perfect. Although better ordered than they were, all of those countries in ART MX are still treated as "other" countries, and it would be ultimately preferable to re-write the ART scheme as a whole to include all modern art in a single sequence. There are also problems with the classification of art materials beyond the ART collection itself which will require ongoing work, such as "indigenous" art included in the ANTHROPOLOGY collection.

It was good to be able to complete a practical project correcting an ethical issue in this manner, rather just identifying and listing issues to be addressed, such as Illegal Aliens in LCSH, which we are still considering how best to achieve. This project highlights some of the benefits and drawbacks of a local scheme: it makes it easy to fix a problem when we spot it, although the burden of maintenance still falls on us, which led to the problem in the first place. Although the maintenance issue with LCSH is obviously less for us, the maintenance of local variants will be considerable.

The project taught us a lot about how similar small projects could work in terms of technical procedures, especially in Alma which we had only acquired in Autumn 2018, and costs, mostly for the staff time in re-labelling the books. The library is committed to a programme of Liberating the Collections, which is focussed on all aspects of collections work: collecting, classification, cataloguing, policy. We are hoping that we can do some similar small jobs to sort out similar problem areas of the classification, e.g. around Balkan countries still classified under Yugoslavia.

We are also looking at issues around problematic materials, partly stemming from some work we had to do with Holocaust denial literature, and thinking about to handle e.g. obscene art work, unethical research, and the work of eugenicists (UCL has a couple of strong collections on this, and a recent high profile report ended up in buildings being renamed).

We have already used the procedures outlined above to inform similar technical project projects: Andrew Watson (Head of Retrospective Cataloguing) and I recently imported 1900 rare book records that were only in a spreadsheet. We have also implemented a streamlined workflow to derive Ph.D. thesis MARC records from repository records. What has been vital to all of this is documenting detailed workflows and noting problems and quirks. These workflows can then be picked up later once devised as well as communicated and reworked for different purposes.

References

Garside classification on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garside_classification

Garside classification scheme on UCL Library Services website (outlines only) https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/subject-support/garside-classification-scheme

UCL Library Services Art subject pages (including a link to the detailed ART classification schedules) https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/subject-support/guides/art

The Slade School of Fine Art website https://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/